

## Bishops issue documents on women's advancement

By Jerry Filteau  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — In two separate documents released Oct. 13, committees of the U.S. Catholic bishops called for advancing the role of women in the church but explained why that does not include admission to ordained priesthood.

The longer text, "From Words to Deeds: Continuing Reflections on the Role of Women in the Church," comes from the bishops' Committee on Women in Society and the Church, chaired by Auxiliary Bishop John C. Dunne of Rockville Centre, N.Y.

It addresses what has been done and remains to be done in three areas:

- Appreciating and incorporating the gifts of women in the church.

- Appointing women to church leadership positions.

- Promoting collaboration between men and women in the church.

The other document, titled "Ten Frequently Asked Questions About the Reservation of Priestly Ordination to Men," comes from the Committee on Doctrine, chaired by Archbishop Daniel E. Pilarczyk of Cincinnati.

Starting with the question of what the church teaches, it says the church "has no authority to confer priestly ordination on women" and this is a teaching, "to be held definitively by all the faithful as belonging to the deposit of faith."

At its September meeting the Administrative Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops reviewed both documents and approved their publication. They were released jointly in Washington.

"From Words to Deeds," issued as a 26-page booklet, builds on the bishops' 1994 pastoral reflection on women in church and society, "Strengthening the Bonds of Peace."

While it focuses on women's roles in church communities and institutions, it notes by way of perspective the "critical value (for all lay Christians) of being church in one's family, workplace and society."

Within the family, it adds, "we call attention to and reaffirm the tremendously important role of women as wives and mothers."

It says each of the three goals it addresses — incorporating women's gifts in the church, appointing women to leadership and promoting collaboration with women — arises from "a deep concern for the effectiveness of the church's mission" and "finds its rationale in the light of mission."

The document says that since Jesus' day "women have graced church history with their holiness, courage, intellectual gifts and works of justice and mercy. ... Too often, however, women's contributions have gone unnoticed and undervalued."

Meanwhile, the doctrine committee's separate statement on women's ordination says, "The purpose of these questions and answers is not to 'prove' the truth of the church's teaching, which must be accepted in faith, but to offer some background to assist the faithful in their acceptance of what the church teaches."

It explains that when a teaching belongs to the deposit of faith, that means "it belongs to, or is necessarily connected with, what the church has received from Christ."

The statement cites "fidelity to Christ's example and to apostolic practice" and the church's "constant and universal tradition" as basic reasons for the teaching that only men can be ordained.

Acknowledging that some women feel called to ordination, it says the church must test and validate any claim to such a calling, but "the church must follow the example of Christ who called women to discipleship but not to membership in the Twelve."

The other document, on advancing the role of women in the church, says on the topic of women in church leadership that church law reserves "only a few offices or ecclesiastical roles to the ordained."

"In the past," it says, "we have encouraged church leaders to identify the church roles, especially leadership roles, that are open to women. We now need to shift our thinking. We assume that all roles in the church are open to women unless stated otherwise in canon law. The roles are open; we need to continue to identify, invite and educate the women who can fill them."

It calls for active recruitment of women for leadership positions and "personnel

policies that will attract and retain competent women." It urges use of financial and other resources to assure that women working for the church have access to the education and formation needed to take up or advance in church leadership positions.

The statement calls effective collaboration in ministry a "huge task" that involves development of the personal and relational skills of those called on to collaborate, and at times changes in their attitudes and self-understanding.

It also cites sensitive use of inclusive language as an important foundation for effective collaboration between men and women.



Reuters/CNS

## Conflict ensnares refugees

An ethnic Albanian refugee eats bread outside a family's crowded makeshift tent in a refugee camp near Kosovo. The United Nations continued discussions of whether to launch a military strike to stop Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosovic's efforts to force the Albanians from Kosovo.

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